

Social security numbers

On Feb. 20 the **Social Security Administration (SSA)** published final rules for issuing social security numbers (SSNs). Generally the rules say that applicants must show certain proofs of identity before they may get original, duplicate or corrected SSN cards. This is being done to protect the integrity of the SSN system by reducing its misuse; and these changes apply to all applicants.

From the beginning of the social security program in 1939, numbers were generally issued on the basis of an individual's statements about his or her identity without requiring evidence to prove these statements. This met the need for a simple and quick issuance procedure.

In 1943, however, an Executive Order required that all Federal agencies use the SSN if they needed any system for identifying individuals. Since then use of SSNs as identification has grown and has become subject to greater misuse.

People have used SSNs to create fictitious persons for such reasons as: cheating welfare programs (i.e., Aid to Dependent Children and Supplemental Security Income), avoiding alimony payments, wiping out a history of bankruptcy or bad debts, and defrauding the **Internal Revenue Service**.

To carry out his responsibility to ensure the integrity of the SSN identification system, the Secretary of **Health, Education, and Welfare Dept.** has approved additional regulations to improve the way SSNs are issued. These regulations provide that:

- Each applicant for an original SSN must submit documentary evidence to prove his or her identity, age, and citizenship or alien status.
- Each applicant for a duplicate or corrected SSN card must submit enough evidence to prove his or her identity and make certain his or her SSN record is accurate.
- Each applicant for an original SSN who is age 18 or older must be interviewed in person.
- A birth certificate alone is not enough to prove identity unless the applicant is a child under 7, there is no other evidence of identity, and there is no reason to doubt the validity of the birth certificate or the SSN application.
- SSA may check with the custodian of the original record, any document given it as evidence by an SSN applicant.

Any individual needing an SSN may apply for one by filing a signed form SS-5, "Application for Social Security Number," at the following places: (1) Any local social security office; (2) The Social Security Administration, Baltimore, MD 21235; (3) Offices of District Directors of Internal Revenue; (4) **US Postal Service** offices (except the main office in cities having a social security office); and (5) **US Employment Service** offices in cities which do not have a social security office. Upon request, the social security office will distribute a quantity of application form SS-5 to labor unions, employers or other representative organizations.

All SSN applicants must submit evidence proving their date of birth. Birth or baptismal certificates, school and church records, census records, insurance policies, marriage records, employment records, and passports may be used. Applicants are also required to confirm their identity through drivers' licenses, voter registration cards, passports or other similar documents. SSA prefers that such documents contain the applicant's signature for comparison purposes.

Details—Federal Register: Feb. 20, page 10369. For more information write or call Phil Berge, Office of Policy and Regulations, Social Security Administration, 6401 Security Boulevard, Baltimore, MD 21235; telephone 301-594-7452.

"Refused mail"

Effective March 29 the **Postal Service (PS)** is amending its regulations dealing with "refused mail" in situations where a business soliciting ticket orders, special licenses, contests, or other products and services, imposes a quota or limits the number of orders it will fill.

Under the final rule, businesses who solicit such orders will not be permitted to return them as "Refused" after the available supplies of tickets, products, spaces, etc., have been promised, allocated or used. All such left-over requests or orders must be placed into newly addressed envelopes bearing proper postage before being put into the mails.

This means, if you answer a mail order solicitation (before any time limit is up), the company cannot refuse to accept your order from the mailman and expect either the PS or you to pay the return postage. Even if the company has run out of tickets, goods, etc., it is responsible for return postage on orders received and accepted within any advertised time limit.

The regulation does not apply to consumers who order merchandise and then decide they don't want it. PS regulations on this subject are not being changed. A merchandise order may still be refused at the discretion of the consumer at the time it is delivered. Even after delivery, consumers may mark such a piece of mail **REFUSED** and return it so long as it is unopened, **EXCEPT** for registered, insured, certified, and **COD** mail.

Nor does the regulation apply to book and record club members who often continue to receive merchandise even after they have dropped their club membership. The new rule in no way affects the consumer's privilege to refuse such merchandise.

Details—Federal Register: Feb. 27, page 11069. For further information contact George Thomas 202-245-4512.

Pranx playing tricks (?) Huk-A-Poo too (allegedly)

April 16 is deadline for comments on a proposed consent agreement between the **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)**, **Huk-A-Poo Sportswear** and **Pranx Fashions** that the companies will not fix the prices of clothing which their retailers sell and advertise.

The consent agreement, which is not an admission of wrongdoing by the companies, would also prohibit them from suggesting retail prices for 3 years, pre-ticketing their products with suggested retail prices, policing the retail prices of retailers or threatening or taking action against merchants who do not follow the manufacturers' suggested prices.

Among other things, the complaint alleges that Huk-A-Poo and Pranx have:

- Established agreements or understandings with retailers to maintain certain resale prices or sale periods.
- Established agreements that merchants will not advertise the companies' regular products at other than established or suggested prices.
- Threatened, intimidated or terminated those retailers who: sold products other than at the suggested retail prices, advertised any first-line quality product other than at the suggested retail prices, or advertised close-out, irregular or promotional products as having been manufactured by Huk-A-Poo or Pranx.
- Used various means of coercion, (including delaying shipments or restricting the availability of products), against merchants who engaged in any of the above activities.

• Refused to deal with certain prospective retailers, such as discounters, because of their pricing policies.

The proposed order also requires the 2 companies to reinstate any former retailer who was terminated after Jan. 1, 1974 for failing to maintain retail prices—if the retailer meets applicable credit requirements.

The companies must mail a copy of the consent order or the press release in this matter to all existing accounts and to any new accounts purchasing products within the next 5 years.

Huk-A-Poo and Pranx are located in New York City, and this consent agreement was handled by FTC's New York office. Both companies sell and distribute clothing throughout the country.

Public comments are encouraged and will become part of the public record. At the end of the comment period, FTC will decide whether to accept, reject or modify the consent order.

Details—Federal Register: Feb. 16, page 10074. Send comments to Office of the Secretary, Federal Trade Commission, 6th St. and Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20580. For more information write or call Leroy Richie, Director 8R, New York Regional Office, Federal Trade Commission, 2243-EB Federal Bldg., 26 Federal Plaza, New York, NY 10007; telephone 212-264-1207.

Bumper standards

April 30 is deadline for comments on **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA)** advanced notice of proposed rulemaking on performance standards for automobile bumpers.

The existing bumper standard prohibits any damage to a car body in a 5 mile-per-hour (mph) collision with a stationary barrier or in a pendulum test. Beginning Sept. 1, 1979, the rule will also require that damage to the bumper itself be severely limited.

NHTSA is answering a request from the Senate Appropriations Committee that a study be done on the effectiveness of the 5 mph bumper standard in comparison to requirements at different speeds. The agency has prepared a preliminary report based on a study by **Houdaille Industries** of West Virginia, a manufacturer of bumpers, and a study by the **John C. DeLorean Corp.** on the consumer price of the present bumper standards.

Houdaille Industries has recommended that a new standard be set at 2.5 mph which, according to the DeLorean study, would increase consumer costs from approximately \$50 to \$100.

NHTSA is seeking consumer comment—and those wishing to comment may obtain copies of the *Federal Register* notice (which asks specific consumer questions relating to the studies), the calculations supporting the agency's preliminary report to the Appropriations Committee, as well as copies of the Houdaille and DeLorean studies. These are available by writing to Eleanor Kitts, Room 4423, NHTSA, 400 7th St., SW, Washington, DC 20590.

Details—Federal Register: March 1, page 11569. Comments should be marked Docket No. 73-19; Notice 25 and sent to Room 5108, Nassif Building, 400 7th St., SW, Washington, DC 20590. For more information write or call Michael Brownlee, Room 5319 at the address above; telephone 202-426-1740.

Octane posting

April 25 is deadline for comments on the **Energy Dept.'s Economic Regulatory Administration (ERA)** proposal to amend its petroleum price regulations on the posting of octane numbers by retail gasoline dealers.

The proposed amendment would have ERA delete its current octane posting requirements (which were never actively enforced), in order to avoid duplication with the more comprehensive **Federal Trade Commission (FTC)** regulations on octane postings. These will be issued later this year under the **Petroleum Marketing Practices Act**.

The Act was signed by President Carter last June to "encourage conservation of automotive gasoline and competition in the marketing of such gasoline by requiring that information regarding the octane rating of automotive gasoline be disclosed to consumers."

Octane rating is a measure of how well gas will resist "knocking" in an engine. A persistent or severe knock can seriously damage a car's engine. However, according to the FTC staff report, "octane overbuying" by consumers can unnecessarily add to cost of gas and deplete energy resources while contributing to air pollution. "Higher octane gasolines often cost more than the lower octanes, and consumers who buy more octane than is needed to control engine knock derive no benefit from the additional money they spend."

In addition to comment on the deletion of octane posting requirements, ERA would also like consumer comment on whether the maximum lawful price posting requirements of the present rule should be eliminated or changed to make them more effective in protecting consumers.

Under the proposed regulations, provisions requiring the posting of maximum lawful selling prices would be kept. However, comments are specifically requested on whether this requirement is necessary and appropriate under current market conditions and, if so, whether the requirement should be modified to make compliance less burdensome and more effective.

Commentors are also requested to give information they may have on compliance with the present price posting and whether consumers are getting enough useful information to make gasoline purchase decisions. If ERA decides that the price posting requirements should be eliminated or made more effective, appropriate changes will be made in the final rule.

There will be a public hearing on this proposal on March 21 at 9:30 am in Room 2105, 2000 M St., NW, Washington, DC 20461. Although it is too late to speak at the hearing, consumers are welcome to attend as observers. Transcripts will be made and the entire record will be available for inspection at the ERA Office of Public Information, Room B110 at the address above. Any person may purchase a copy of the transcript from the reporter.

Details—Federal Register: Feb. 28, page 11237. **CONSUMER REGISTER:** Jan. 15, 1979. Send comments to Office of Public Hearings Management, Economic Regulatory Administration, Docket No. ERA-R-79-8, Room 2313, 2000 M St., NW, Washington, DC 20461. For further information write or call Robert C. Gillette, at the above address; telephone 202-254-5021.

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